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the freethinker

the voice of atheism

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'Hardline' Islamic schools are being whitewashed by inspectors

Ofsted and the Charity Commission have been accused of "whitewashing" hardline Islamic schools that are radicalising new generations of Muslims in the UK.

An investigation last month by the *Sunday Telegraph* has established that the education watchdog has published positive reports praising Muslim schools for their contribution to community cohesion – even in the case of a school which openly states that Muslims "oppose the lifestyle of the West".

The Ofsted inspector responsible for many of the reports, Michèle Messaoudi, has been accused of having links to radical Islamist organisations.

Andrew Gilligan's investigation revealed that another recent Ofsted inspector, Akram Khan-Cheema, is the chief executive of a radical Muslim educational foundation, IBERR. Its website describes Islamic schools as "one of the most important factors which protect Muslim children from the onslaught of Euro-centrism, homosexuality, racism, and secular traditions".

Ofsted has also passed the inspection of dozens of Muslim schools to a new private "faith schools watchdog", the Bridge Schools Inspectorate, which is co-controlled by Islamic schools' own lobbying and trade body, the Association of Muslim Schools.

The Bridge Schools Inspectorate allows Muslim head teachers to inspect each other's schools.

Among the schools directly inspected by Ofsted was the Madani Girls' School, a private Islamic school in London's East End.

Its Ofsted report, written by Mrs Messaoudi, said it made pupils "aware of their future role as proactive young British Muslim women" and left them "well-prepared for life in a multicultural society".

However, the Madani Girls' School's own website openly states: "If we oppose the lifestyle of the West, then it does not seem sensible that the teachers and the system which repre-

sents that lifestyle should educate our children."

It says that under Western education "our children will distance themselves from Islam until there is nothing left but their beautiful names".

Last month, this newspaper revealed how girls at the school were being forced to wear the Islamic veil, a fact that was not mentioned in its 2008 Ofsted report. The Madani School declined to comment last night.

Ofsted also inspected the Tawhid Boys' School in Hackney,

north London. Its Ofsted report, written by Mrs Messaoudi, said the curriculum was "good ... broad and balanced in Key Stages 2 and 3".

However, the school's prospectus says that the curriculum is kept strictly "within the bounds of sharia [Islamic law]". Its art syllabus bans pupils from drawing human beings, animals and objects that Islam deems "unlawful". The school did not return calls.

Mrs Messaoudi also wrote the Ofsted report cited by Ed

Balls, the then schools secretary, as "clearing" schools run by supporters of the racist, extremist sect Hizb ut Tahrir.

The schools, the Islamic Shakhshiyah Foundation establishments in Haringey, north London, and Slough, Berks, received more than £113,000 of public funding and became the subject of national controversy after being exposed in *The Sunday Telegraph*.

One of the Foundation's trustees, Farah Ahmed, who is also headmistress of the Slough school, wrote a chapter in a Hizb ut Tahrir pamphlet attacking the National Curriculum for its "systematic indoctrination" of Muslim children "to build model British citizens".

She criticised "attempts to integrate Muslim children" into British society as an effort "to produce new generations that

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The Catholic Church is a spent force in Spain

BARRY DUKE ON VIRGINS, BIG BANGS, AND A WHIMPER FROM POPE RATZINGER

I really wish someone would tell me exactly who the virgin is who is responsible for an outbreak of big bangs that persisted for days in my new home town of Benidorm last month. The noise began on the morning of November 13, when I heard a series of ear-shattering explosions. I rushed onto my 31st floor balcony to see clouds of smoke pouring from several levels of a nearby tower block, and immediately thought the worst.

Then I remembered. That Saturday was the start of a five-day fiesta honouring the Virgin of the Sufragio. Curiously, Google offers no details as to who she was.

During these five days each November there is deafening music on the streets, fireworks, one heck of a lot of drinking, and a "hunt the virgin" contest, which really tickled me as Benidorm is the last place on the planet you're ever likely to find a real, live virgin.

I asked a few natives whether there was a Catholic dimension to all this noise and frolicking, and they simply laughed. "Oh", said one, "maybe once, but now nobody in Spain gives a shit about religion. We just love the festivals

inspired by the Church."

Not surprising then that a particularly glum Pope left Spain after a weekend visit a week or so before, whimpering his displeasure over the fact that Spain is less Catholic now than at any time in its past.

Indeed, Ratzinger went so far as to warn of an "aggressive anticlericalism" in Spain which he said was akin to that experienced during the 1930s.

"The clash between faith and modernity is happening again, and it is very strong today," he said. And he pointed out that "Spain saw in the 1930s the birth of a strong and aggressive anticlericalism". Where that anticlericalism came from, and where today's (alleged) anticlericalism comes from, the pontiff did not say, which prompted one commentator to observe: "That lack of any broader vision or context seems to characterise many of his readings on history."

Ratzinger's failure to elaborate on his statement may have been deliberate, for to have done so would have meant casting an unwelcome light on several aspects of the Church's despicable behaviour in Spain in the years preceding the 1930s, notably the Inquisition, its encouragement of the persecution of Jews, and its opposition to all forms of political liberalism. This interference left Spain foundering in a fog of social and economic backwardness while the rest of Europe surged ahead. And this is what led eventually to outbreaks of violence. From 1822 to 1936, at least 235 members of the clergy were assassinated and around 500 churches and religious centres were burned. In addition, in the three years of the Civil War, almost 7,000 priests, monks and nuns suffered the same fate.

But there can be no doubt that in alluding to the 1930s, Ratzinger was hankering after the dark days of General Franco, once described by H G Wells as "every inch a murderous little Christian gentleman".

In the early years of the Franco regime, the Catholic Church and state had a close and mutually beneficial association. The loyalty of the Roman Catholic Church to the Francoist state lent legitimacy to the dictatorship, which in turn restored and enhanced the Church's traditional privileges – privileges which had been lost when the republican Popular Front took over.

The Republican government, which came to power in Spain in 1931, was based on secular principles. In the first years some laws were passed secularising education, prohibiting religious education in the schools, and expel-

ling the Jesuits from the country. On Pentecost 1932, Pope Pius XI protested against these measures and demanded restitution. He asked the Catholics of Spain to fight with all legal means against the "injustices". On June 3, 1933 he issued the encyclical *Dilectissima Nobis*, in which he lamented the expropriation of all church buildings, episcopal residences, parish houses, seminaries and monasteries.

By law, they were now the property of the Spanish State, to which the Church had to pay rent and taxes in order to continue to use these properties. "Thus the Catholic Church is compelled to pay taxes on what was violently taken from her", he howled. Religious vestments, liturgical instruments, statues, pictures, vases, gems and similar objects necessary for worship were expropriated as well.

In contrast to the anticlericalism of the Popular Front, the Franco regime established policies that were highly favourable to the Church, which was restored to its previous status as the official religion of Spain. In addition to receiving government subsidies, the church regained its dominant position in the education system, and laws were made to conform to Catholic dogma.

During the Franco years, Roman Catholicism was the only religion to have legal status; other worship services could not be advertised, and only the Roman Catholic Church could own property or publish books. The government not only paid priests' salaries and subsidised the church, but it also assisted in the reconstruction of church buildings damaged by the war. Laws were passed abolishing divorce and banning the sale of contraceptives. Catholic religious instruction was mandatory, even in public schools.

Although it is true that the Church fell out of love with Franco in the latter days of his rule, and played a cooperative and supportive role in the emergence of plural democracy in Spain, it was outraged when a new, democratic Spain immediately began a vigorous programme of wide-ranging reforms – from the legalisation of abortion to gay marriage – which basically sent a signal to the Vatican that it needed to back off and stop interfering in the lives of the Spanish people.

The Vatican's subsequent attempts to regain some its influence have come to nought. Today in Spain the Catholic Church is truly a spent force, and with this in mind I happily joined in raising a glass to the life of Virgin of the Sufragio – whoever the hell she was.



BARRY DUKE
FREETHINKER
EDITOR

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Freethinker/GW Foote & Co Ltd
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Email: barry@freethinker.co.uk
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Pakistani woman condemned to die for alleged blasphemy

A PAKISTANI court has sentenced to death a Christian mother of five for blasphemy, the first such conviction of a woman in that country. Asia Bibi, 45, was sentenced last month by a court in Nankana district in Pakistan's central province Punjab, about 75 kilometres west of the country's cultural capital of Lahore.

Pakistan has yet to execute anyone for blasphemy, but the case spotlights the Muslim country's controversial laws on the subject, which human rights activists say encourages Islamist extremism in a nation wracked by Taliban attacks.

Bibi's case dates back to June 2009 when she was asked to fetch water while out working in the fields. But a group of Muslim women labourers objected, saying that as a non-Muslim, she should not touch the water bowl.

A few days later the women went to a local cleric and alleged that Bibi had made derogatory remarks about the "Prophet" Mohammed.

The cleric went to police, who opened an investigation.

She was arrested in Ittanwalai village and prosecuted under Section 295 C of the Pakistan Penal Code, which carries the death penalty. Sentencing her to hang, Judge Naveed Iqbal "totally ruled out" any chance that Ms Bibi was falsely implicated and said there were "no mitigating circumstances", according to a copy of the verdict.

Bibi's husband Ashiq Masih, 51, said that he would appeal against her death sentence, which needs to be upheld by the Lahore High Court, the highest court in Punjab, before it can be carried out.

He said "The case is baseless and we will file an appeal."

The couple have two sons and three daughters.

Human rights activists and minority pressure groups said it was the first time that a woman had been sentenced to hang in Pakistan for blasphemy, although a Muslim couple were jailed for life last year.

Human rights activists want the controversial legislation repealed, saying it is exploited for personal enmity and encourages Islamist extremism.

Human Rights Watch spokesman Ali Dayan Hasan said: "The blasphemy law is absolutely obscene and it needs to be repealed



in totality. It is primarily used against vulnerable groups that face social and political discrimination. Heading that category are religious minorities and heterodox Muslim sects."

About three per cent of Pakistan's population of 167 million is estimated to be non-Muslim.

Last July, two Christian brothers accused of writing a blasphemous pamphlet critical of the Prophet Mohammed were shot dead outside a court in Punjab.

Pastor Rashid Emmanuel, 32, and his brother Sajjad, were killed as they left a court hearing in Faisalabad city, where hun-

dreds of Muslim protesters had demanded they be sentenced to death.

A few days later news emerged that Walid Husayin, the 26-year-old son of a Muslim scholar in the small West Bank town of Qalqiliya, was behind bars after being exposed as an atheist blogger.

Husayin, described as a "shy barber" who prayed with his family each Friday, created uproar in the Muslim world by secretly posting anti-religion rants on the Internet during his free time.

Now he faces a potential life prison sentence on heresy charges for "insulting the divine essence" – and many in his town say he should be killed for renouncing Islam. Even family members say he should remain behind bars for life.

Said Abdul-Latif Dahoud, a 35-year-old Qalqiliya resident, "He should be burned to death". He added that the execution should take place in public "to be an example to others".

Over several years, Husayin is suspected of posting arguments in favour of atheism on English and Arabic blogs, where he described the God of Islam as having the attributes of a "primitive Bedouin." He called Islam "a blind faith that grows and takes over people's minds where there is irrationality and ignorance."

Ancient Jewish inheritance law toppled by NY judge

A NEW York woman has won a landmark court victory to keep a house bequeathed to her by her parents. Amy Neustein found herself locked out of the house by her brother, who claimed a religious right to evict her.

Ancient Jewish law says the first-born son – the *b'chor* – inherits a double share of his parents' assets; daughters get nothing.

But Brooklyn Judge Diana A Johnson not only ruled the house was legally hers, but awarded Neustein over a half a million dollars in damages from her brother for having locked her, just days after her father's death, out of the family home her parents had bequeathed her. "For over seven years, while I racked up crushing legal fees, my brother barricaded my childhood home," said Neustein.

She added: "When my brother locked the doors against me less than a week after my father died, he boasted that, as the first-born son, he could take my old home, even though a deed my parents wrote in 2001 made me the sole owner after their deaths."

"Although I ultimately won justice, I have been saddened at how much I've had to fight alone."

Neustein's court battle lasted eight years.



Islamic schools 'whitewashed'

reject Islam". She described English as "one of the most damaging subjects" a school can teach and attacked fairy tales, saying that these "reflect secular and immoral beliefs that contradict the viewpoint of Islam".

She also attacked the "obvious dangers" of Shakespeare, including *Romeo and Juliet*, which advocates disobeying parents and premarital relations".

Mrs Messaoudi's Ofsted report on the Haringey school said it was "satisfactory".

However, an earlier Ofsted report by a different inspector, only seven months before, had described the school as "inadequate" and had said "more could be done to promote cultural tolerance and harmony".

The Charity Commission also investigated the school after the *Sunday Telegraph* articles. It ruled that there were no concerns over the public funding, saying that since the main Hizb ut Tahrir trustee, Yusra Hamilton, had resigned, it was "not necessary for the commission to examine further the impact of her being a trustee".

However, Mrs Hamilton resigned only after being exposed in this newspaper, and was a trustee of the schools at the time the public money was paid. She continues to work with children as a volunteer at the Haringey school.

Mrs Ahmed has confirmed that she was a member of Hizb ut Tahrir, and refused to deny that she still shared its views.

"This report is deeply intellectually dishonest", said Hannah Stuart, of the Centre for Social Cohesion think-tank, which has closely investigated Hizb ut Tahrir.

"You can clearly see that they knew exactly what went on, yet bent over backwards to cover their own backs."

The Charity Commission said that it had found "no evidence that Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology was being taught at or brought into the school".

Mrs Messaoudi has written a book published by the Islamic Foundation, Britain's foremost centre of Islamist intellectual thought. According to the website of the hardline Islamist "Global Peace and Unity" (GPU) conference, both she and Mr Khan-Cheema were judges for its education awards held last month. GPU is organised by the Islam Channel, a digital TV station which hosts a number of fundamentalist and extremist presenters.

A number of extremists spoke at the GPU event, though moderates also ap-

Continued from page 1

peared, and items glorifying terrorism were on open sale there. Mrs Messaoudi was also listed as a judge for the 2008 GPU awards.

Mrs Messaoudi declined to comment. However, Ofsted, speaking on behalf of Mrs Messaoudi and Mr Khan-Cheema, said they were both "experienced professionals and we have no reason to doubt their ability in conducting inspections".

It said Mrs Messaoudi's clearing of the Shakhsiyah school was in a report "specifically designed as a follow-up to ensure that the school had undertaken the improvements required as a result of our first inspection".

Nord Anglia Education, which employed Mr Khan-Cheema on contract to Ofsted, declined to comment.

Sources said Mrs Messaoudi had criticised some Muslim schools for Ofsted and her judgments of the Madani School were not wholly uncritical. Ofsted said its inspections generally were "thorough, rigorous and methodical".

Many Muslim schools, however, are not inspected by Ofsted at all. Within the past two years, the watchdog has passed the scrutiny of many private "faith" schools to the Bridge Schools Inspectorate, a joint venture between the Christian Schools' Trust and the Association of Muslim Schools.

Unlike "mainline" Ofsted inspections, which are carried out entirely by professional inspectors, BSI inspections of Muslim schools are often done by a team of three which always includes one head

teacher of another Muslim school.

The BSI report into Bury Park Educational Institute, a mixed but gender-segregated Muslim secondary in Luton, claims that "the quality of education is good" even though the report itself admits that girls at the school get less teaching than boys.

"Some aspects of National Curriculum subjects are in a few respects currently less for the girls than for the boys," it says, and there is not yet "full, equal access to National Curriculum subjects" between girls and boys.

Girls, says the report, are sometimes denied the opportunity for PE, "which they say they miss". There is no suggestion that Bury Park teaches separatist views or opposition to British society.

One of the BSI inspectors who wrote the report into Bury Park, Ibrahim Hewitt, is chairman of the controversial charity Interpal, which is banned in the United States having been accused of supporting the terrorist group Hamas.

Interpal insists that it does not support Hamas and the Charity Commission has cleared Interpal. Mr Hewitt is also a headmaster of a Muslim school in Leicester and a senior member of the ruling "shura", or executive committee, of the Association of Muslim Schools.

Mohammed Mukadam, a spokesman for BSI and also chairman of the Association of Muslim Schools, said: "All our inspections are led by former HMIs [professional inspectors]."

"The conflict-of-interest argument would be valid if our head teachers were leading the inspections, but there is no conflict of interest. Our schools tell us that BSI inspections are much more rigorous than Ofsted's."

On behalf of the AMS, he admitted: "There are some schools which are actively opposed to certain British values. But a new generation of schools is coming in with a better understanding of the British context."

Ms Stuart, of the Centre for Social Cohesion, said: "A whole generation is being brought up to at the very least suspect, and perhaps even despise, the society they will have to live in. This is deeply worrying for the future of community cohesion."

"By whitewashing these schools, Ofsted and the Charity Commission are being negligent in their responsibility to protect children in their formative years."

Rabbi faces jail for extortion

A PROMINENT Brooklyn rabbi has been convicted in a scheme to extort a Connecticut-based hedge fund into paying millions of dollars to two religious schools.

Rabbi Milton Balkany, 64, was found guilty in Manhattan federal court last month of extortion, blackmail, wire fraud and false statement charges.

Prosecutors say the 64-year-old Balkany threatened and lied to workers at the unnamed hedge fund to persuade them to send him cheques totalling \$3.25 million.

Balkany faces up to 20 years in prison on the wire fraud count at his sentencing on February 18.

Britain's 'persecuted' Christians: the 'victim' list keeps expanding

THE latest zealot to leap onto the persecution bandwagon is a Christian doctor who claims she was ousted from a council adoption panel after refusing to endorse gay couples. But Dr Sheila Matthews' claim of religious discrimination was rejected last month by an employment tribunal.

Concluding a two-day hearing, regional employment judge John MacMillan said she had no case against the council. He said: "The complaints of religious discrimination fail and are dismissed. This case fails fairly and squarely on its facts."

Matthews resigned from her £72,000-a-year post as a community paediatrician, claiming her career had been irreparably damaged.

Matthews blames political correctness for creating a "hostile climate" for Christians, adding "It is getting really scary. The anger I feel is not only for me but for lots of other people of faith who feel they have to choose between their beliefs and their job."

However, following protests, Northamptonshire decided that she could continue with the central part of her role – conducting medical examinations of would-be adoptive parents and children waiting to be adopted. But she will not be allowed to take part in the adoption panel's votes on whether candidates would make suitable parents.

Dr Matthews says her objections to gay adoption are based on scientific findings as well as biblical teachings.

She added "I've been overwhelmed by the support I've received from the public. I'm pleased with the council's decision because it allows me to carry on providing a service to children and social services. Unfortunately, while I can now do my work as a community paediatrician, I won't be allowed to vote on recommendations for any of the candidates.

"There is research which supports my position that a same-sex partnership is not the best family setting to bring up children. As a Christian and a paediatrician I believe that children do best with a mother and father in a committed, long-term relationship. Therefore, I cannot recommend a same-sex household to be in the best interest of a child, despite what politicians may have legislated for."

Dr Matthews, from Kettering, sought advice and support from the Christian Legal Centre (CLC). Andrea Minichiello Williams,



Dr Sheila Matthews

barrister and director of the CLC said: "We are hoping the Council will see further sense and allow Dr Matthews to remain a voting panel member, giving advice on health matters directly to Panel and participating in discussions, but with the freedom to abstain on the rare occasions where placement is proposed with a same-sex couple."

A spokesman for Northamptonshire County Council said: "We have told Dr Matthews that the county council has no objection to her continuing to provide medical advice to the adoption panel.

"However, we have told Dr Matthews that

she cannot continue to act as a full member of the adoption panel with voting rights as she is not fulfilling the full duties of a panel member by refusing to vote on adoption issues regarding same-sex couples."

Her discrimination claim follows that of Eunice and Owen Johns, a couple from Derby who were banned from fostering because of their "traditional" Christian views about homosexuality.

Just weeks earlier, the High Court, sitting at Nottingham Crown Court, was asked to decide whether a local authority – Derby Council – should allow a Pentecostal Christian couple, who strongly disapprove of homosexuality, to be foster parents.

According to the Christian Legal Centre, which is championing the case of Eunice and Owen Johns, this is the first time that a court has been asked to decide how local authorities should deal with foster carers who have "traditional views on sexual ethics".

The CLC added: "The implications are huge. It is no exaggeration to say that the future of Christian foster carers and adoptive parents hangs in the balance, and that the outcome of this case will have a direct effect on whether Christians decide to apply to be foster carers or adoptive parents. It may not be long before local authorities decide that Christians cannot look after some of the most vulnerable children in our society, simply because they disapprove of homosexuality."

Man won't destroy the earth, only God can

A US Congressional Representative from Illinois, John Shimkus, has aspirations to become the Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce committee. Here's what Shimkus has to say about global warming: "I believe [the Bible] is the infallible word of God, and that's the way it is going to be for his creation ... The earth will end only when God declares its time to be over. Man will not destroy this earth. This earth will not be destroyed by a flood."

To make his point, Shimkus cites Genesis, the part where God promised Noah that once was enough.

Craig A James, writing on the *Religion Virus* blog, commented: "So Rep Shimkus thinks we can be as evil as we like, and God will make sure that the Earth isn't destroyed. And that makes Shimkus qualified to decide that global warming is a liberal hoax.

"Even here in the US, the land of religious tolerance, we put limits on religious freedom. We don't let children die because their parents are religious zealots who don't believe in medicine. We ban animal sacrifices. We don't allow illegal drugs to be used in religious ceremonies except in a few very narrowly defined cases. We allow religious freedom but draw the line when beliefs threaten the life or health of others.

This is why Rep. Shimkus should be disqualified to serve on the House Energy and Commerce division. Shimkus' beliefs are dangerous."

Fresh scandal hits Vatican Bank

The Pope's *annus horribilis* has been made a whole lot worse by a fresh financial scandal at the Vatican Bank. The Institute for the Works of Religion, or IOR, as it is also known, has been a regular source of embarrassment for the Vatican since its foundation in 1942 by Nazi supporter, Pope Pius XII.

Earlier this year magistrates in Rome ordered the freezing of 23 million euros (£20-million pounds) of IOR funds held at a branch of an Italian bank in the capital, and placed the Chairman and Director-General of the Vatican Bank under investigation on suspicion of money laundering.

Criticised for its slow and insensitive response to the clerical sex-abuse scandal, this time the Vatican mounted a rapid damage-control operation as the story gained space in the international media.

A statement from the Secretariat of State was followed by a front-page article in the Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*, and a letter of explanation from Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi to the *Financial Times*, all attributing the problem to a procedural oversight and defending the probity of the IOR management.

The Vatican expressed its "perplexity and amazement" at the Rome prosecutor's initiative, which it said came at a time when the IOR was working to bring its banking practices into line with international norms on tax havens and money laundering. The news, according to *The Italian Insider*, couldn't have come at a worse time for IOR Chairman Ettore Gotti Tedeschi, who had just completed his first year at the helm of the Vatican Bank with a brief from Pope Benedict to reform the tainted financial institution, and who was in the process of launching his new book, *Money and Paradise. Catholics and the Global Economy*.

A member of the conservative Catholic organisation Opus Dei, former head of Bank Santander's Italian operations, and a professor of ethical finance, Gotti Tedeschi is a trusted economic adviser to the Pope and contributed to the Pope's recent encyclical on economic matters, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth).

Gotti Tedeschi's book, which carries an introduction by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican Secretary of State and the most senior church official after Pope Benedict, argues that demographic growth is the key to the creation of wealth and attributes the global financial meltdown to a failure of morality and the negation of life.

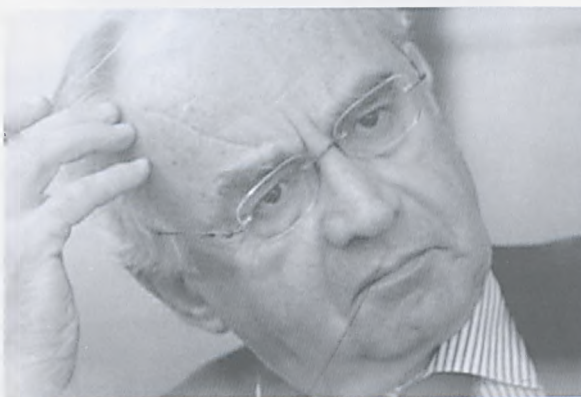
"In the Western world, which has reduced

its birth rate to below zero, we created the conditions for crisis, while in the formerly emerging world, which continued to produce children, we saw development and the creation of wealth," the IOR chairman wrote. "We Westerners thought we would become rich by denying life, but instead we became poorer."

The depletion of scarce resources, pollution and global warming appear to warrant scant attention in Gotti Tedeschi's analysis.

The banker said he had felt "bitterness and humiliation" that a procedural error had been used as an excuse to attack the IOR and the Vatican in general. The bulk of the frozen money belonged to the IOR itself and was being moved to Frankfurt, to an account at JP Morgan, in order to buy German government bonds, he said.

The secretive institution, housed in a medi-



Ettore Gotti Tedeschi

eval tower, where some 130 employees manage a fortune estimated at more than £4-billion on behalf of around 44,000 depositors, mainly religious individuals and institutions, has unsettling form. Many still associate the bank with the reckless management of American Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, who risked being arrested by Italian magistrates after embroiling the IOR in the financial adventures of Roberto Calvi, known as "God's banker", who was found hanging under London's Blackfriars Bridge in 1982.

Calvi's Banco Ambrosiano collapsed with debts of \$3.5 billion, much of it siphoned away through offshore companies in the Caribbean and used to support church-backed anti-communist endeavours in Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Calvi's death was ruled to be a murder. There are even those who believe that the untimely death of Pope John Paul I in 1978, only 33 days into his tenure, may have been a murder to prevent him from carrying out a close look at the IOR's finances..

Damaging revelations about Marcinkus'

conduct continue to emerge even today.

In March a witness told a Rome appeal court that the Mafia-linked mayor of Palermo, Vito Ciancimino, had used the IOR to launder Cosa Nostra's money.

Ciancimino's son, Massimo, said his father had held two accounts in the Vatican and particularly appreciated its extraterritorial impenetrability. "One of the accounts was for family money and the other for funds destined for politicians and for the friends of Cosa Nostra," Ciancimino junior said.

And the weekly magazine *L'Espresso* published claims from a new book that the mistress of a Rome underworld boss had had an affair with the American archbishop and had personally delivered large quantities of criminal cash to the IOR in a Louis Vuitton bag.

"Monsignor Marcinkus? Of course I knew him," Sabrina Minardi was quoted as saying. "I don't know if they had told him that I was a fun-loving girl and could be nice to people who were generous. But he wanted to go with me... And I went."

Minardi is collaborating with Rome magistrates investigating the 1983 disappearance of Emanuela Orlandi, the daughter of a Vatican employee, and has explained that her sometimes confused testimony is the consequence of excessive cocaine use in the past.

Unfortunately for the Vatican, though, her credibility is bolstered by the fact that her crime boss lover, Renato De Pedis, was granted the unusual honour of being buried in the crypt of a central Rome church, after being gunned down in a gangland slaying.

The continuing emergence of such allegations ensures that Gotti Tedeschi faces an uphill task in convincing the world that the embarrassing connections and malpractice of the Marcinkus era have truly been consigned to the past.

The bank was founded by Pius XII to manage the Vatican's coffers, and operates outside the central administrative structure of the Catholic Church.

Just as Pope Pius has been accused of helping Hitler and the Nazis, the IOR is alleged to have funded various right-wing movements across the globe. In 1999, under John Paul II, a lawsuit was filed in a US District Court alleging that the institute colluded with the collaborationist Croatian government to steal assets from Hitler's victims. (The case was dismissed because of the Holy See's diplomatic immunity.)

'Assumed into Heavenly Glory'

From the pen of the late **NEIL BLEWITT** comes this deliciously amusing examination of the Virgin Mary's assumption into heaven

In 1950 Pope Pius XII declared that Mary, the mother of Jesus, "having completed her earthly course in body and soul assumed into heavenly glory". Since popes had been pronounced infallible 80 years earlier, there can be little room for argument in the matter.

It was a belief formulated by Gregory, bishop of Tours, in the 6th century. He had written a history of the period from the Creation to his own time, so he was obviously well informed. But it is doubtful if he reached his conclusion on the assumption unaided. Several books on the subject were available that were written before Gregory's time by such eminent authors as Theodosius, archbishop of Alexandria, Joseph of Arimathea and St John, the title of whose book – *The Discourse of St John the Divine Concerning the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God* – must have demanded attention.

It should be noted that some scholars aver that Joseph's manuscript is no older than the 15th century. But a quick calculation will reveal that this would make Joseph about 1,200 years of age when he wrote his memoir. This is plainly absurd; even Methuselah only reached 969 years.

The idea of bodily escalation into heaven was not original in Mary's day. It was stated in a 1st-century book that the feat had been performed by Moses several centuries earlier – and this despite the fact that he himself recorded in Deuteronomy that he was definitely buried and quite dead at the time. The author of Kings recorded that Elijah too rose bodily to heaven, in his case assisted by a whirlwind so fierce it seems to have whisked off his mantle – which must have made his upward journey attended by some discomfort, not to say embarrassment.

That Moses and Elijah ascended bodily to heaven may be proved by the maxim that what comes down must have gone up in the first place, and three of the four gospels recorded that both Moses and Elijah returned to earth in order to converse with Jesus at the Transfiguration several hundred years after their deaths.

Later, Jesus himself ascended bodily to heaven. This was confirmed by a witness who was able to offer proof that he had reached His destination, since he observed him to be sitting at the right hand of God.



It is odd then, given these examples of bodily ascensions, to which may be added that of Enoch, that St John should have written in his gospel that no man had ascended into heaven but Jesus when the books relating to Moses and Elijah's ascents would have been available, as would the divine inspiration in its composition. It cannot be that John was unfamiliar with the Old Testament since he quoted from it in his gospel. Odder too, perhaps, that according to a postscript from *The Acts of John* he himself was eventually translated. A second postscript seems to confirm this, for it relates that when some of his friends dug in the place where his body had been laid, they found only his sandals.

There are only a few references to Mary in the New Testament, the last significant one being in Acts which suggests that she may have been with the disciples when the Holy Ghost came upon them at Pentecost, although on this occasion without the extraordinary consequences to Mary that attended their first encounter.

The early church apparently was unaware that Mary had ascended bodily into heaven until the distinguished gentlemen mentioned earlier – and there were others – wrote of it. Their books were not included in the New Testament although they have as much to recommend them as the four gospels.

These books differ in the details of Mary's assumption but, taken together, they present a fairly clear picture of the sequence of events. When Mary was about to die, many of the disciples were performing mission-

ary duties in various parts of the world and others were dead; but the latter were raised and all of them transported on clouds to her deathbed in either Jerusalem or Bethlehem (the accounts differ) by the Holy Ghost or an angel (again the accounts are at variance). Jesus then came for Mary's soul and with him Moses, David, Adam, Eve, Anna (the mother of Mary), the patriarchs, prophets and saints – everybody who was anybody in fact. After taking her soul up to heaven, Jesus returned for her body. It was not made clear why two separate journeys were necessary. It cannot be that Jesus forgot that both parts would be required; sons of gods do not have such lapses. However, body and soul were eventually reunited and transported to heaven – in some accounts by Jesus alone and in others, variously, accompanied by chariots, clouds of light and a choir of angels.

Joseph of Arimathea – whose colourful career deserves a paper to itself – stated that Thomas was late to arrive – which is not surprising since he had to travel via a cloud from India – to witness the assumption; but he was just in time to see Mary ascending from the Mount of Olives and was able to call out to her before she disappeared. When he told the other disciples of this they, in a curious reversal of roles, doubted him; but as proof of what he had said, he produced Mary's girdle which she had thrown down to him. They obviously recognised it and begged Thomas's pardon. And this girdle may still be viewed today by the curious and cynical if they care to visit Prato in Italy.

The account of Mary's assumption to heaven may seem extraordinary – unreal even. But it should be remembered that when one is dealing with the activities of gods we should expect no less.

• **Editor's Note:** "Assumption", according to one Catholic website, means "to be taken up" body and soul to Heaven. It is not Ascension, like Jesus, done by his own power, but Assumption done by the power of God. It is something God did for her, not something she did herself. It is a gift of God as a result of Christ's redemptive power applied to Virgin Mary. The Dogma says, "The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son's Resurrection".

EXCEPTIONALISING ISLAM

Why parallel legal systems are a threat to the West

OSKAR FREYSINGER, leader of the Swiss People's Party, was blocked three times in Belgium this autumn from delivering a talk about Islam. He finally succeeded in conveying his views – which were neither extreme nor Muslimophobic – to the Flemish Parliament.

Among the voices raised in protest against the trial in Holland of Geert Wilders on charges of inciting hatred against Islam was Switzerland's Oskar Freysinger, who declared: "The end of the freedom of speech is the end of democracy!"

Freysinger, leader of the Swiss People's Party, is no stranger himself to the quelling of criticism regarding radical Islam. Earlier this year the Diamant Conference Centre in Schaerbeek, Belgium, under pressure from the mayor and the police, refused to allow him to deliver a talk on Islam. Then it was the turn of the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Brussels to deny him a platform. The proprietor told him: "You will not find any hotel room in Brussels prepared to welcome you, as political pressures are too great. You see, I am a businessman, and cannot go against the system."

Shortly after, Freysinger was denied a third venue, but finally he succeeded in delivering his talk, in which he appealed "for a sort of enlightenment for Islam", in the Flemish Parliament.

There he bluntly told MPS that Europe is running adrift – not because of fanatics occupying European countries, but because of "the cowards" who allow the fanatics to get away with their unreasonable demands.

"Intolerance and censorship are now the preserve of those who have only the words 'openness' and 'tolerance' on their lips", said Freysinger. "Paradoxically, our fight for freedom is being conducted for them and their children, yet they are trying to muzzle us."

At the start of his address, he asked: "Is Islam a threat? If yes, in which areas and in which ways? These are questions I will try to answer without any animosity toward Muslims as individuals, because they are often the first victims of a piti-



Oskar Freysinger

less dogma, leaving them little choice in managing their lives.

"At the beginning of this reflection we should ask ourselves how any rule of law keeps religious peace within the state. This can be accomplished via a secular legal regime that places itself above religious dogma and which guarantees equal treatment to all faiths. The protector must be placed above the protected so that its protection is effective and granted in the same way to all.

"Religious faith is inherently unprovable and therefore beyond any checks. If a legislator is to ensure equal treatment for all religions, faith X and faith Y are necessarily put on the same level, and people should be free to choose their religion, and move from one religion to another. Religious freedom is the oldest fundamental right of any modern constitutional state. However, once religious faith is politicised, the dogmatisation of policy threatens. One religion then influences policy to the point that it eventually bans, isolates or oppresses all other religious beliefs (for example, Iran, Afghanistan, etc), while at the same time imposing its own unprovable and unchanging dogma on the rest."

"The problem that Islam poses to Western democracies is not primarily theo-

logical in nature, but above all political and legal," said Freysinger.

He added: "In Switzerland, as in any democracy worthy of the name, every law is democratically legitimised. This means that our laws can change, unlike Islamic religious law (sharia), which is irreversible and autonomous because it is considered of divine origin: it is given once and for all, and is not accountable to anyone.

"As opposed to the inhabitants of the 57 member countries of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, the Swiss people may, under our conception of law, broadly participate in the political process through the instruments of direct democracy. In contrast, the populations of Islamic countries do not have the right to challenge sharia, which in those countries is equal to immutable scientific knowledge.

"It is precisely this tendency of Islam to control both private life and the public organisation of society, and thus its overall influence on the design of people's lives, which distinguishes it from other religions.

"If compatibility problems between Islamic and Western cultures are not religious, but legal, it is because sharia precedes the formation of the state and is essentially the foundation on which an existing state is built (the Islamic nomocracy). Islam distinguishes three territorial situations: in the *Dar al Islam* (land of peace), Islam has triumphed and reigns supreme; in the *Dar el Harb* (land of war), the infidels are in power; and in the *Dar el Suhl* (which can be translated as land of armistice), Islam is still a minority and therefore must adapt, but every Muslim who lives there must do everything possible to make his religion triumphant someday. Thus, minarets, separate cemeteries, as well as koranic schools and mosques become small extraterritorial

regions in impure lands – beachheads of Islam in the territory which, even if modest, only Islamic law applies.

“In *Dar es Islam*, the holy land where Islam has previously been established, no law competing with sharia – for example, our criminal and civil law – is allowed. This “holy land” of Islam in Europe now includes many urban neighborhoods in France, Great Britain and Germany. Muslims there are the majority, they have their own cemeteries, their mosques and their koranic schools. These places are spread throughout the West and grow in number and size. The minarets are furthermore symbols of this penetration. They invoke the image of little flags that generals stick on their maps to mark the progress of their troops. The word minaret comes from *Al Manar*, the lighthouse. However, these “lighthouses of jihad” or the “bayonets of Islam,” in the words of the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, are not required by the Koran and play no role in the religious ritual of Islam.

“In fact, the minaret is the foremost symbol of a conspicuous total submission to a doctrine and its related intolerance. If we tolerate the construction of minarets on Swiss territory, the conflicts that take place in the East, for example between the Ottoman and Alawite Muslims, will happen here. Instead of encouraging mutual tolerance and religious harmony, we stir up conflicts in the great doctrinaire diversity of Islam. Indeed, for the Alawi or secular Muslims, the minarets are an affront and a sign that a certain expression of Islam seeks to position itself as the only representation of this religion in Switzerland.

“Respect for ourselves and caution should encourage us to prevent the spread of laws in our land which are opposed to the Swiss legal system and based on a totally different conception of human rights. As noted by the European Court of Human Rights, sharia is incompatible with our conception of law, particularly in the areas of marriage law, human rights and criminal law. The acceptance of the veil or segregated swimming lessons for Muslim children are examples of concessions justified by the tolerance of foreign cultures. Our tolerance of such things may seem unimportant, but in fact it opens a Pandora’s Box in terms of law. These apparently modest changes of laws and rules are intended to recognise a parallel right in Switzerland which is totally alien to ours.

“In hospitals, too, fundamentalist customs are appearing: husbands refusing to let their wives be treated by male doctors, refusal of treatment etc. This leads to



Voting in a referendum, last year 57 percent of the Swiss voted to ban minarets in their country

absurd situations. In *Liberation* on July 7, 2010, Isabelle Levy recounts the case of a patient who was never examined during her pregnancy and who went to an emergency room because she had contractions. She refused to be examined by male doctors, and she left with her ongoing contractions. Suddenly, the staff heard screams. The woman was giving birth on the lawn. The nurse told her: ‘You refused to be examined by a man, but you have just given birth in front of a hundred people!’

“This paralleling of two different legal systems in the same state is particularly dangerous because of the increasing isolation of certain ethno-religious groups in ghettos. Since the Enlightenment our society has been built on the principle of individualism; society is therefore not prepared to welcome and integrate groups that function as quasi-inaccessible enclaves. Individualism encourages the free formation of opinions, and it slows nepotism by weakening the clan system. But this system only works in a more or less homogeneous society whose members know and respect the general rules. In addition, the state must be ready to impose these rules. The problem is that most non-European societies operate on a completely different principle; the interests of clans and families are placed above the general interest.

“The higher the number of immigrants coming from countries with a pronounced clan structure, the more problems our society has. For example, it is shocking that we therefore allow, under the pretext of ‘family reunification’, which refers to the core of the European family, not only the wife and children of immigrants, but also brothers, sisters, grandparents and cousins to join the EU area. The biggest problem of modern Eu-

ropean states is the fact that uncontrolled immigration and the weakening, even the removal, of external borders causes the emergence of many internal borders, sometimes invisible.

“If we refuse to seek answers to such problems, if we make them taboo in order not to deal with them, the EU, a promising area of freedom, is likely to become a region of societies in conflict.”

Freysinger wound up his address with the following recommendations:

1. Our state law has a duty to require immigrants to be in full compliance with our legal system and to avoid any concessions, however modest they may appear, which could encourage, if only vaguely, the establishment of parallel legal systems. Recognising that the segregation of groups, particularly the Islamic population, through exceptional rights such as separate cemeteries, general exemptions from swimming lessons, and forced marriages, prevents them from experiencing our cultural heritage, such that the vaunted integration is nothing more than useless posturing.

2. Although we may risk interfering with residential freedom, we must prevent the formation of ethnic ghettos, and thus the emergence of parallel societies indifferent to each other.

3. We must prevent fanatical religious leaders from getting their hooks in certain ethnic groups by speaking more harshly against these extremist leaders.

4. We must endeavour to limit the flow of immigration, to welcome immigrants in lower numbers, but to integrate them better.

He added that, “finally, it is hoped that Islam may reform itself in the years to come and that it goes through a sort of Enlightenment, putting a definitive end to fanatical Islamism. As this is not yet the case, we have a duty to protect our state against all forms of subversion. It is not acceptable that our liberal principles of rule of law are being used as the instruments for its disintegration, and ultimately its destruction. This also concerns the freedom and security of Muslims themselves, especially those who truly seek to integrate with us. To fight against the excesses of Islam in Western states is perhaps above all to protect the Muslims from their ‘brothers’.”

• An Amsterdam court has appointed three new judges for Geert Wilders’ trial. The previous judges were dismissed after a string of irregularities which legal officials said could be deemed prejudicial to Wilders. No date has yet been set for a new trial.

An Atheist Manifesto Part II

In this last part of his manifesto, written from the American perspective, **SAM HARRIS** argues that religion *can* be done away with, and that those societies which have succeeded in doing so are far better off without it

It is perfectly absurd for religious moderates to suggest that a rational human being can believe in God simply because this belief makes him happy, relieves his fear of death or gives his life meaning. The absurdity becomes obvious the moment we swap the notion of God for some other consoling proposition: imagine, for instance, that a man wants to believe that there is a diamond buried somewhere in his yard that is the size of a refrigerator. No doubt it would feel uncommonly good to believe this. Just imagine what would happen if he then followed the example of religious moderates and maintained this belief along pragmatic lines: when asked why he thinks that there is a diamond in his yard that is thousands of times larger than any yet discovered, he says things like, "This belief gives my life meaning," or "My family and I enjoy digging for it on Sundays," or "I wouldn't want to live in a universe where there wasn't a diamond buried in my backyard that is the size of a refrigerator." Clearly these responses are inadequate. But they are worse than that. They are the responses of a madman or an idiot.

Here we can see why Pascal's wager, Kierkegaard's leap of faith and other epistemological Ponzi schemes won't do. To believe that God exists is to believe that one stands in some relation to his existence such that his existence is itself the reason for one's belief. There must be some causal connection, or an appearance thereof, between the fact in question and a person's acceptance of it.

In this way, we can see that religious beliefs, to be beliefs about the way the world is, must be as evidentiary in spirit as any other. For all their sins against reason, religious fundamentalists understand this; moderates – almost by definition – do not.

The incompatibility of reason and faith has been a self-evident feature of human cognition and public discourse for centuries. Either a person has good reasons for what he strongly believes or he does not. People of all creeds naturally recognize the primacy of reasons and resort to reasoning and evidence wherever they possibly can. When rational inquiry supports the creed it is always championed; when it poses a threat, it is derided; sometimes in the same



Sam Harris

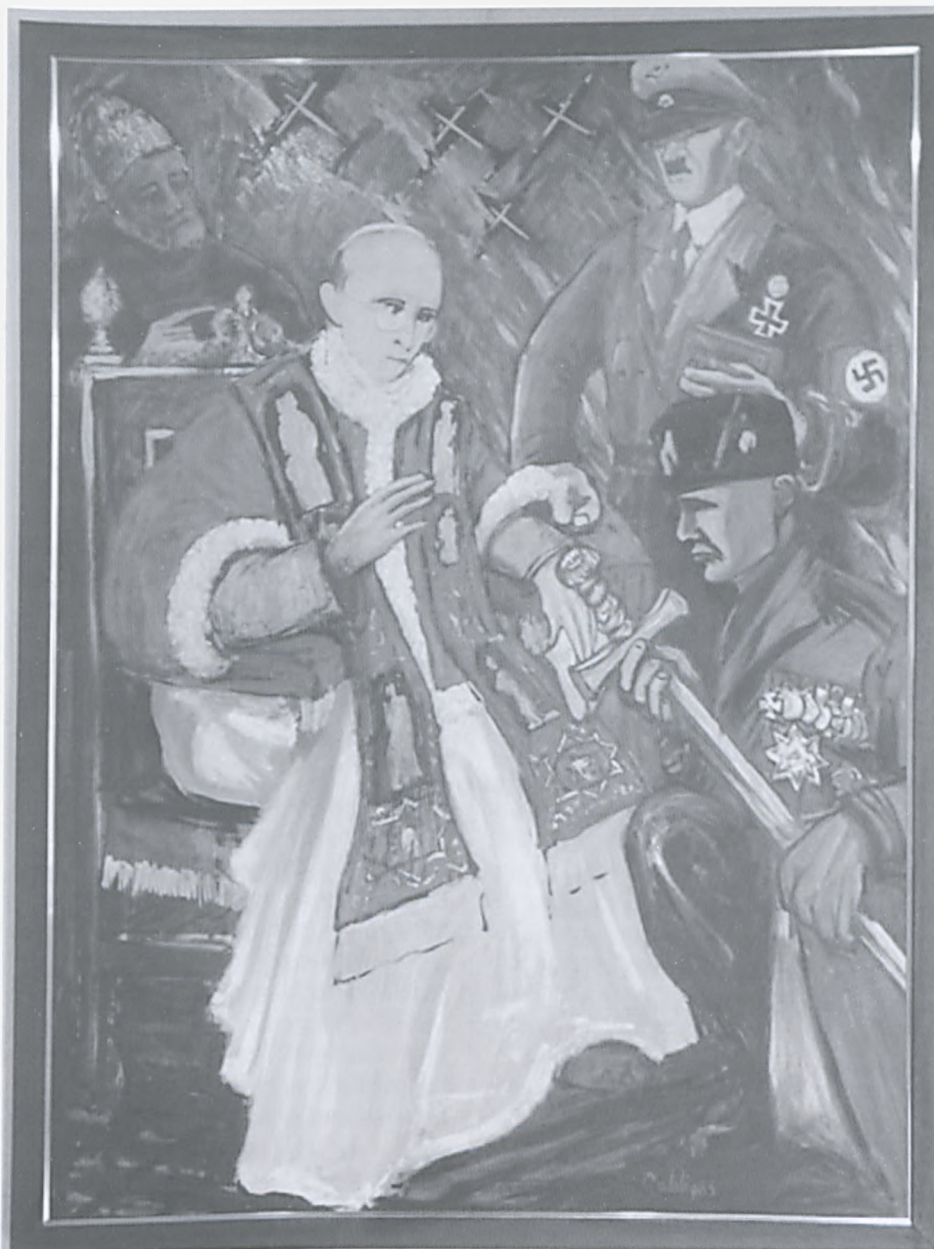
sentence. Only when the evidence for a religious doctrine is thin or nonexistent, or there is compelling evidence against it, do its adherents invoke "faith". Otherwise, they simply cite the reasons for their beliefs (eg "the New Testament confirms Old Testament prophecy," "I saw the face of Jesus in a window," "We prayed, and our daughter's cancer went into remission"). Such reasons are generally inadequate, but they are better than no reasons at all. Faith is nothing more than the license religious people give themselves to keep believing when reasons fail. In a world that has been shattered by mutually incompatible religious beliefs, in a nation that is growing increasingly beholden to Iron Age conceptions of God, the end of history and the immortality of the soul, this lazy partitioning of our discourse into matters of reason and matters of faith is now unconscionable.

People of faith regularly claim that atheism is responsible for some of the most appalling crimes of the 20th century. Although it is true that the regimes of Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot were irreligious to varying degrees, they were not especially rational. In fact, their public pronouncements were little more than litanies of delusion – delusions about race, economics, national identity, the march of history or the moral dangers of intellectualism. In many respects, religion was directly culpable even here. Consider the Holocaust: the anti-Semitism that built the Nazi crematoria brick by brick was a direct inheritance from medieval Christianity. For centuries, religious Germans had viewed the Jews as the worst species of heretics and attributed every societal ill to their continued presence among the faithful. While the

hatred of Jews in Germany expressed itself in a predominately secular way, the religious demonization of the Jews of Europe continued. (The Vatican itself perpetuated the blood libel in its newspapers as late as 1914.)

Auschwitz, the gulag and the killing fields are not examples of what happens when people become too critical of unjustified beliefs; to the contrary, these horrors testify to the dangers of not thinking critically enough about specific secular ideologies. Needless to say, a rational argument against religious faith is not an argument for the blind embrace of atheism as a dogma. The problem that the atheist exposes is none other than the problem of dogma itself – of which every religion has more than its fair share. There is no society in recorded history that ever suffered because its people became too reasonable.

While most Americans believe that getting rid of religion is an impossible goal, much of the developed world has already accomplished it. Any account of a "god gene" that causes the majority of Americans to helplessly organize their lives around ancient works of religious fiction must explain why so many inhabitants of other First World societies apparently lack such a gene. The level of atheism throughout the rest of the developed world refutes any argument that religion is somehow a moral necessity. Countries like Norway, Iceland, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Japan, the Netherlands, Denmark and the United Kingdom are among the least religious societies on Earth. According to the United Nations' Human Development Report (2005) they are also the healthiest, as indicated by measures of life expectancy, adult literacy, *per capita* income, educational attainment, gender equality, homicide rate and infant mortality. Conversely, the 50 nations now ranked lowest in terms of human development are unwaveringly religious. Other analyses paint the same picture: the US is unique among wealthy democracies in its level of religious literalism and opposition to evolutionary theory; it is also uniquely beleaguered by high rates of homicide, abortion, teen pregnancy, STD infection and infant mortality. The same comparison holds true within



The anti-Semitism that built the Nazi crematoria brick by brick was a direct inheritance from medieval Christianity, Harris points out. The Catholic Church's involvement in the Holocaust is depicted in this painting, entitled Pope Pius XII Blessing the Fascists' Arms, by Hungarian Holocaust survivor Moïse Galili

the US itself: Southern and Midwestern states, characterized by the highest levels of religious superstition and hostility to evolutionary theory, are especially plagued by the above indicators of societal dysfunction, while the comparatively secular states of the Northeast conform to European norms. Of course, correlational data of this sort do not resolve questions of causality – belief in God may lead to societal dysfunction; societal dysfunction may foster a belief in God; each factor may enable the other; or both may spring from some deeper source of mischief. Leaving aside the issue of cause and effect, these facts prove that atheism is perfectly compatible with the basic aspirations of a civil society; they also prove, conclusively, that religious faith does nothing to ensure a society's health.

Countries with high levels of atheism also

are the most charitable in terms of giving foreign aid to the developing world. The dubious link between Christian literalism and Christian values is also belied by other indices of charity. Consider the ratio in salaries between top-tier CEOs and their average employee: in Britain it is 24 to 1; France 15 to 1; Sweden 13 to 1; in the US, where 83 percent of the population believes that Jesus literally rose from the dead, it is 475 to 1. Many a camel, it would seem, expects to squeeze easily through the eye of a needle.

One of the greatest challenges facing civilization in the 21st century is for human beings to learn to speak about their deepest personal concerns – about ethics, spiritual experience and the inevitability of human suffering – in ways that are not flagrantly irrational. Nothing stands in the

way of this project more than the respect we accord religious faith. Incompatible religious doctrines have balkanized our world into separate moral communities – Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, etc – and these divisions have become a continuous source of human conflict. Indeed, religion is as much a living spring of violence today as it was at any time in the past. The recent conflicts in Palestine (Jews versus Muslims), the Balkans (Orthodox Serbians versus Catholic Croats; Orthodox Serbians versus Bosnian and Albanian Muslims), Northern Ireland (Protestants versus Catholics), Kashmir (Muslims versus Hindus), Sudan (Muslims versus Christians and animists), Nigeria (Muslims versus Christians), Ethiopia and Eritrea (Muslims versus Christians), Sri Lanka (Sinhalese Buddhists versus Tamil Hindus), Indonesia (Muslims versus Timorese Christians), Iran and Iraq (Shi'ite versus Sunni Muslims), and the Caucasus (Orthodox Russians versus Chechen Muslims; Muslim Azerbaijanis versus Catholic and Orthodox Armenians) are merely a few cases in point. In these places religion has been the explicit cause of literally millions of deaths in the last ten years.

In a world riven by ignorance, only the atheist refuses to deny the obvious: religious faith promotes human violence to an astonishing degree. Religion inspires violence in at least two senses: (1) People often kill other human beings because they believe that the creator of the universe wants them to do it (the inevitable psychopathic corollary being that the act will ensure them an eternity of happiness after death). Examples of this sort of behavior are practically innumerable, jihadist suicide bombing being the most prominent. (2) Larger numbers of people are inclined toward religious conflict simply because their religion constitutes the core of their moral identities. One of the enduring pathologies of human culture is the tendency to raise children to fear and demonize other human beings on the basis of religion. Many religious conflicts that seem driven by terrestrial concerns, therefore, are religious in origin. (Just ask the Irish.)

These facts notwithstanding, religious moderates tend to imagine that human conflict is always reducible to a lack of education, to poverty or to political grievances. This is one of the many delusions of liberal piety. To dispel it, we need only reflect on the fact that the September 11 hijackers were college educated and middle class and had no discernible history of political oppression. They did, however, spend an inordinate amount of time at their local mosque talking about the depravity of infidels and about the pleasures that await martyrs in Paradise. How many more architects and mechanical engineers must hit the

wall at 400 miles an hour before we admit to ourselves that jihadist violence is not a matter of education, poverty or politics?

The truth, astonishingly enough, is this: a person can be so well educated that he can build a nuclear bomb while still believing that he will get 72 virgins in Paradise. Such is the ease with which the human mind can be partitioned by faith, and such is the degree to which our intellectual discourse still patiently accommodates religious delusion. Only the atheist has observed what should now be obvious to every thinking human being: if we want to uproot the causes of religious violence we must uproot the false certainties of religion.

Why is religion such a potent source of human violence?

- Our religions are intrinsically incompatible with one another. Either Jesus rose from the dead and will be returning to Earth like a superhero or not; either the Koran is the infallible word of God or it isn't. Every religion makes explicit claims about the way the world is, and the sheer profusion of these incompatible claims creates an enduring basis for conflict.

- There is no other sphere of discourse in which human beings so fully articulate their differences from one another, or cast these differences in terms of everlasting rewards and punishments. Religion is the one endeavor in which us-them think-

An Atheist Manifesto

ing achieves a transcendent significance. If a person really believes that calling God by the right name can spell the difference between eternal happiness and eternal suffering, then it becomes quite reasonable to treat heretics and unbelievers rather badly. It may even be reasonable to kill them. If a person thinks there is something that another person can say to his children that could put their souls in jeopardy for all eternity, then the heretic next door is actually far more dangerous than the child molester. The stakes of our religious differences are immeasurably higher than those born of mere tribalism, racism or politics.

- Religious faith is a conversation-stopper. Religion is the only area of our discourse in which people are systematically protected from the demand to give evidence in defense of their strongly held beliefs. And yet these beliefs often determine what they live for, what they will die for, and – all too often – what they will kill for. This is a problem, because, when the stakes are high, human beings have a simple choice between conversation and violence. Only a fundamental willingness to be reasonable –

to have our beliefs about the world revised by new evidence and new arguments – can guarantee that we will keep talking to one another. Certainty without evidence is necessarily divisive and dehumanizing. While there is no guarantee that rational people will always agree, the irrational are certain to be divided by their dogmas.

It seems profoundly unlikely that we will heal the divisions in our world simply by multiplying the opportunities for interfaith dialogue. The endgame for civilization cannot be mutual tolerance of patent irrationality. While all parties to liberal religious discourse have agreed to tread lightly over those points where their worldviews would otherwise collide, these very points remain perpetual sources of conflict for their coreligionists. Political correctness, therefore, does not offer an enduring basis for human cooperation. If religious war is ever to become unthinkable for us, in the way that slavery and cannibalism seem now, it will be a matter of our having dispensed with the dogma of faith.

When we have reasons for what we believe, we have no need of faith; when we have no reasons, or bad ones, we have lost our connection to the world and to one another. Atheism is nothing more than a commitment to the most basic standard of intellectual honesty: one's convictions should be proportional to one's evidence. Pretending to be certain when one isn't – indeed, pretending to be certain about propositions for which no evidence is even conceivable – is both an intellectual and a moral failing. Only the atheist has realized this. The atheist is simply a person who has perceived the lies of religion and refused to make them his own.

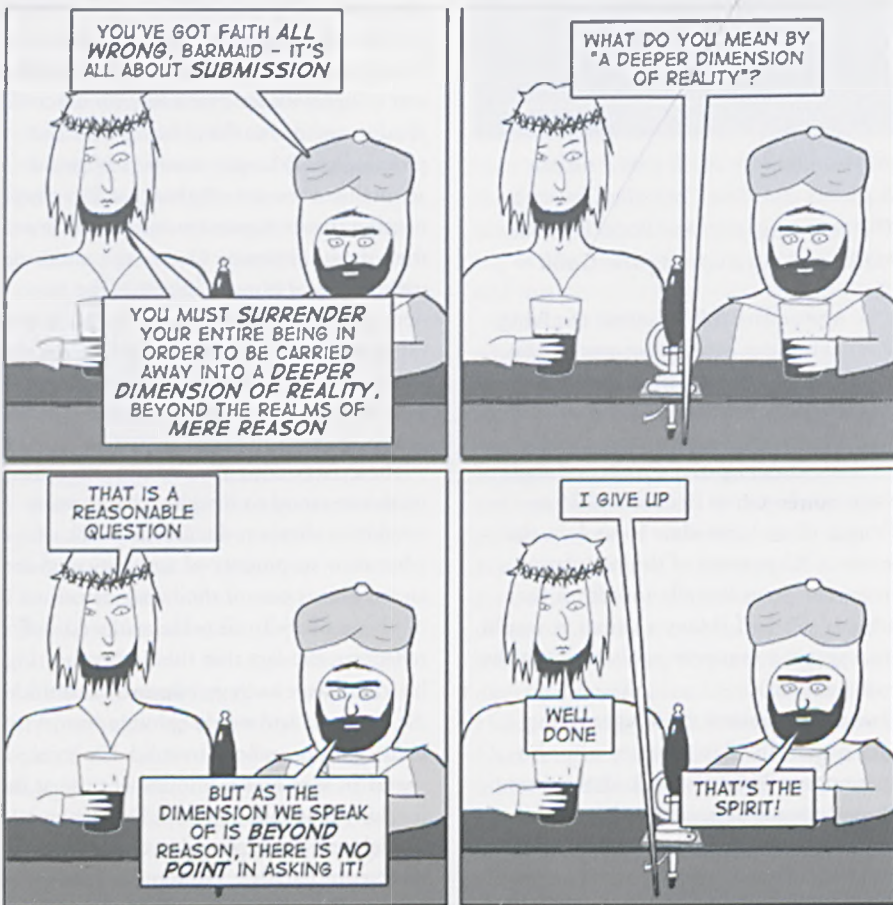
Victory for science in Louisiana

By a vote of 8–4, the Louisiana's Textbook/Media/Library Advisory Council last month voted to support biology textbooks that uphold sound science and do not allow fundamentalist religious concepts to interfere.

According to the Associated Press, most of those who testified at the hearing wanted to teach evolution without the interference of religious concepts.

"There is no major research university in this country that teaches intelligent design or anything like that. It is simply not science," Kevin Carman, dean of the LSU College of Science told the AP. "We need our textbooks to be focused on what is scientifically accurate and not religion."

Jesus & Mo



New Bible translation is an outstanding achievement

G RICHARD BOZARTH reviews *The Protestant Bible Correctly Translated*, edited and translated by **WILLIAM HARWOOD**



ONE of the superstars of early Christianity, Jerome, solo translated the Bible into Latin. Now, 1,600 years later, one of the most prolific of living freethought writers has repeated that performance. William Harwood's modern English translation is an outstanding achievement worthy of honours and respect.

The Protestant Bible Correctly Translated is a huge book compared to other modern English translations like *The Jerusalem Bible* (Roman Catholic canon) and *The New English Bible* (Protestant canon – yes, that's right, after 2,000 years the Bible's contents are still being disputed). These are regular hardback book size – thick, but normal size. *PBCT* is about as thick as *JB* and *NEB*, but is a much more awkward size: 7¼ inches x 10¼ inches. This is necessary because of the way many of the documents are presented to fulfil its mission as a scholars' Bible.

Harwood wants to liberate scholars and freethought writers from “the necessity of quoting from mistranslations” that “forced them to perpetuate the mistranslations' fraudulent propaganda”. The propagandistic mistranslations have “the purpose of concealing that the biblical authors' beliefs were quite different from those of modern Jews, Christians and Muslims”. This is something all freethought writers should welcome with gratitude and admiration.

The necessity of the physical size of *PBCT* is made obvious with the Hexateuch, the first books of the Bible. There have been five authors identified in the production of these books: the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E), the Priestly (P), the Deuteronomist (D), and the Redactor (R). Harwood divides up the books by these authors and presents the material in two columns. I can see the value of this to scholars, but what is lost is that truly outstanding story that is presented in the traditional first ten-and-a-half books of the Jewish Testament (Harwood has also changed the order of the books).

This is the story that spans from the creation of the universe and Adam and Eve to the death of King Solomon. It ranks high in the genre of fantasy fiction (that is, stories that include supernatural forces and entities). The way it is presented in *PBCT*

prevents enjoyment of this wonderful story, and the same can be said of the fairy-tales about Jesus. The two most entertaining versions of the Jesus myth, Matthew and Luke, are completely disrupted. Once again, I can see the value of Harwood's presentation for scholars, but what is lost is not worthless.

I've read the Bible three times in 61 years, so I wasn't willing to read the whole thing again. I selected the Christian Testament's Letters to test the readability of *PBCT*. I can't comment on the correctness of the translation because I'm about as far from being an expert on the Bible's languages as a person can be, but I'm confident I can comment on the appropriateness of at least some of the translations. None of the provocative, controversial translations that caught my attention seemed inappropriate to me, and most of them seemed obviously superior.

PBCT passes the readability test, though it does take a little while to get accustomed to both its style and the unfamiliar versions of many names (“Ioudaian” for “Jew”, “Iesous Khristos” for “Jesus Christ”, “Iakobos” for “James”). Harwood's purpose was to give the most accurate English spelling of names in the language used for each document. In his notes he uses the more familiar versions.

Some translations will be offensive to Judaists and Christians. *PBCT*'s use of “slave” instead of “servant” might upset Christians because “servant” is less degrading than “slave” (which probably explains the preference for it in the other modern English translations). However, the submission and obedience the Christian Testament requires Christians to give are what slaveholders have always considered ideal “virtues” for their slaves. “Slave” would best represent the New Testament attitude even if it wasn't the most correct translation of the word. “Master” instead of “Lord” as one of Jesus's titles is proper because of the theological distortion of the word “lord” that makes it a synonym for “god”. For example, the letter of James was probably written in 48 CE, which was before the Son of God myth had been added to the Christian fairy-tales about Jesus, which meant the writer would never have called Jesus “lord”

the way Christians later called and still today call him “lord”. Continuing to use “lord” would be perpetuating the propagandistic translations Harwood promises to eliminate. It would be like translating “Lord Byron” using a word that means “god” instead of one that means “aristocrat”. There are more controversial translations, too numerous to mention here, and all of them stand out as superior translations.

The Protestant Bible Correctly Translated should be considered an essential book by all those who have professional or amateur scholarly interest in the Bible. All atheists, freethinkers, and secular humanists should have *PBCT* in their libraries and use it. Its one fault – disrupting the best storytelling books in the Bible – is minor (and the stories can be enjoyed in one of the other modern English translations). What it has to offer the reader abundantly compensates for that small fault. All of us in the freethought movement should salute Harwood's accomplishment, especially those of us who are freethought writers.

Highly recommended: *The Secular Outlook*

THE Secular Outlook: In Defense of Moral and Political Secularism, by Professor Paul Cliteur is an excellent justification and explanation of the secular position, writes PETER BRIETBART.

Distinct from books specifically about atheism or anti-religious thought, Cliteur's offering outlines a case for secularism rooted in noble egalitarianism.

This new book is written in language that is clear enough for the layman, and in-depth enough for the advanced reader.

For anyone seeking a more comprehensive understanding of secular thought, this is a marvellous guide. Highly recommended.

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points of view..

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ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIANS

DEREK Wilkes (*Points of View*, October) may be correct in stating that Israel has never instigated violence except in self-defence. Its response to attacks by Arabs has been excessive but one can understand these have been an attempt to halt the rather senseless effort to destroy Israel.

However, the nation was forged by violence by the Zionist gangs. In 1946 they bombed the King David Hotel, killing about 100 people. An ex-army friend told me that the gangs warned prominent Palestinian businessmen and others that if they remained a month after the British left, they would fire a tommy gun up their rectum. A major, a C.O, tried to be neutral in disputes but both parties accused him of favouring the other and he was placed at number four on the Stern gang's hit list!

He described the situation as insoluble. In 1949, Count Bernadotte, a UN mediator, was less fortunate because he was murdered the day after ruling in favour of Palestinians. In 1948/49 over 250 Palestinian villages were destroyed or made uninhabitable by the Zionists; at Deir Yassin about 350 innocent civilians were murdered, often moved down against walls.

Clearly the Arab nations were foolish and certainly premature to wage war in 1948, and they would have been settled and prosperous if they had accepted Partition and the raw deal forced on them due to British duplicity and USA pressure in favour of the Jews. However, it is human nature for any self-respecting people to regard the stealing and encroachment of their land as unacceptable. In 1919 Jews formed about 10 percent of the Palestinian population but they were encouraged to leave Iraq, USA etc, to swell numbers long before the grant of the 1947/8 UN quota and illegally afterwards. Creation of Israel has

been good for the Jews but it is the cause of widespread terrorism and understandable hatred of USA and UK by the Islamic world which forebodes badly for the future.

Gordon Edwards
New Zealand

IN his letter (*Points of View*, November) David Anderson refers to Israel as a "bogus state". This is an innovative concept so far unknown to political science. I take its sense to be negative concerning the legitimacy of the Israeli state and therefore point out that the modern Israeli state was created as a result of a vote taken in the United Nations. This gives it as much legitimacy as any state on earth. Indeed it compares favourably as against the UK state which was founded as a result of the English conquest of Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

As for the early Jews being a "barbarous tribe ... killing, raping" etc, this absurdly partial and totally negative presentation of a people whose history and literature contributed significantly to the emergence of western culture is part of a fashionable anti-Semitism that ought not to be given a place in any publication with pretensions to rationality.

Michael Levin
London

EVERY time a creationist tells us the earth was created in 4004 BC, do we have to demonstrate the radiometric dating of the rocks to refute him?

Every time Derek Wilkes proclaims the innocence of Israel, do we have to trail out the historical evidence to the contrary in all its dreary detail?

Jack Hastie
Scotland

TERRORISM AND ISLAM

MR Wright's contention (*Points of View*, October) that Al-Qaeda is a "gross" distortion of Islam is wrong (though it is what

governments in the West, in the USA in particular, prefer us to believe. The terrorists are as correct as the Sheikh of Mecca, so they will be troublesome, not for 15 years as Mr West of our intelligence services said some three years ago, but for the next 50 at least.

Holy text constructs a different kind of state, what we normally describe as "theodicy", where there is no distinction between morality and duty to the state, and which would be fine if Islam were pacifist or strictly a little tribe on the Red Sea coast. It isn't. "And if they will not convert, chop off their heads".

Secondly, in Islam there is no assumption of freedom of religion in the Western sense of the phrase. There is sufferance of a limited range of Ibrahamic cults where it would have caused much trouble eradicating them. There is "dhimmi" status. Usually, this theological kindness was linked with the assumption that tax is extractable if the unconverted subject is permitted to create wealth while he stays out of the way. This was not tolerance for that creature, nor could it have been. And Mr Wright is not quite right when he says that Al-Qaeda is not synonymous with Islam. The world of Islam can never be clear who has the proper, khalifial mandate. Anyone is a prophet when there is no system of ethics by which a call on heaven-sent morality can be judged. The Mahdi of the Sudan is as convincing as Djamal ai-din af-Afghani, Muqtada ai-Sadr as Osama bin Laden or Yusuf al-Qaradawi as the Sheikh of Mecca ... *ad infinitum*. Bottled anarchy.

So, racked by tensions, the *dar* is best avoided but can't be. However, by pretending, as ALL the world leaders, not least President Obama, have to, we might gain some time. This will mean contradictions in policy – as in the promotion of Islamic schools at the same time as we keep the leading Egypt-

tian preacher, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, out. On the other hand, we still have the freedom to describe Islam as it is presented in the books by the likes of Roger Scruton, Bernard Lewis, Patricia Crone, Samuel Huntington etc, and by persecuted writers such as Ibn Warraq, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Monica Ali, and not least Salman Rushdie. And, though our leaders would rather nobody said anything, it is *that* freedom we have to safeguard..

Al-Qaeda's version of Islam is no more a distortion than that of anybody else's with detailed knowledge of texts. Nor is freedom for this or other totalitarian political construction licensed under either the 1st or 5th amendment. That is precisely why the House Un-American Activities Committee went so savagely after communists, real and imaginary. Unfortunately, there are six billion Muslims ...

Keith Bell
Wales

HISTORICITY OF JESUS

ROBERT Stovold (*Points of View*, November) should note that my claim that Jesus existed is not an "ontologically positive" one (ie not one plucked out of nowhere); instead, that would apply to his claim. My claim is merely less extraordinary than the alternative: practically the whole world and especially historians accept that Jesus did exist.

My claim is not "to knowledge" (nothing is known with certainty); it's to the most likely scenario. If Mr Stovold believes that I endorse the Gospel Birth Narrative then he is mistaken and should read my book.

Lawrie North (same *Points of View*) asks if he has understood the burden of proof correctly. He has not. The "asymmetry" is not unfair; it's just a fact.

Robert Morrell (same *Points of View*) should pay more attention. I did not claim that Tacitus referred to "Chrestus". Let's get this straight: Tacitus referred to "Christus" while Suetonius referred to "Chrestus". It's clear to me that the same person was intended. What is not clear to me is why Mr Morrell sees fit to attack me merely for believing that the Gospels contain some historical material relating to a real person, a hypothesis I justify in my book (has he read it?).

The notion that the Gospels are wholly fictitious is as unsustainable as the notion that they are wholly factual. There is an unfortunate tendency among atheists, freethinkers and humanists to accept the Jesus Myth Theory without question (perhaps to avoid the necessity of debating the material). It's a cop-out.

Stewart Campbell
Edinburgh

INTELLIGENT DESIGN

YOU wrote in *Freethinking Allowed*: "Glasgow awoke one morning last month to discover it had mysteriously acquired a 'Centre for Intelligent Design'. It yawned, turned over and went back to sleep".

Let me assure you that we are monitoring C4ID closely, that it was the subject of a great column in the [Glasgow] *Sunday Herald*, and that the correct response at every level is the subject of intense discussion round here.

Yes, we may have better things to do than pay attention to claims on behalf of a supernatural (and supernaturally incompetent) draughtsman, but in between our eating haggis and swigging lager we do realise that if people want to tell schoolchildren lies about how the world works, that matters very much.

Paul S Braterman

Professor Emeritus, University of North Texas, Honorary Senior Research Fellow in Chemistry, University of Glasgow.

• Editor's note: The link to the *Herald* article is <http://www.heraldsotland.com/news/education/would-you-adam-and-eve-it-top-scientists-tell-scottish-pupils-the-bible-is-true-1.1060545>

BRIETBART'S BOOK REVIEW

I'M not sure what Peter Brietbart ("Keep abreast of new atheist writing", *Freethinker*, November) is on about.

1. He does not have to "assume" that I am a Christian. I say so on page 8 of my book, *A New Inquisition*.

2. I do not use "atheism as an insult". On page 27/8 I refer to "an increasingly liberal and free society, with an increasing respect for both secular and atheist views". From the general tone of young PB's review of my book, it is clear that he (and I guess the *Freethinker* as a whole) has an knee-jerk animus against religion/Christianity, an animus which is not returned by me to him or to you (though you, Barry, got the Vogelenzangs wrong: you insulted them and you had never met them). You're living in the past: most Christians I know are as secular as anyone else.

3. I'm glad PB had a laugh out of my book: but why do I, or anyone else, have to be dismissed as "paranoid" in thinking (allegedly) that "secularism, atheism and Islam" have, in common, a distaste for or indifference to Christianity?

Strong or weak, distaste or indifference, charitable or hostile, there is at least that in common between Islam and the others. And there is no doubt (see Hansard) that the "religious hate" laws

owe their origin to the arrival here of a considerable Muslim population and the events of 9/11 and 7/7. They were designed to protect Muslims. Secularists, atheists and rationalists deluded themselves into thinking that the abolition of the old laws of blasphemy cleared the way for an open season on religion.

4. Messrs Brown and Blair are – rather like Cameron and Osborne and the Milibands – most definitely a new type of professional politician, straight out of University into national-central politics. And – and this is a key point – no longer rooted in mass political parties, as these no longer exist: and such atrophied parties as do exist are managed from the top down by these self-same professional politicians. It's not just me who sees things like this.

5. I do think – see my earlier books – that multiculturalism is a problem, and not the criticism-free general joy and benefit which we are asked to believe. Chancellor Merkel has recently come to the same conclusion. Is she too "plagued by conservatism", "muttering" and "stomping her feet"? Opinion poll after opinion poll shows that a majority of the British people (including members of the ethnic minorities) are bothered about immigration and multiculturalism. Your reviewer, PB, is rather like Gordon Brown at election time – naming as "bigot" a very typical, decent and solid citizen who, like so many others, had concerns about multiculturalism.

6. Several times, PB says that I am right – the "hate" laws I deal with do most definitely radically abridge our free speech. Why, then, the low blows and petulant nasties? I have to assume that, along maybe with the *Freethinker*, he is stuck within a British atheist-rationalist mind set or tradition which simply has to find something to sneer at in the (equally British) Christian tradition. Yet, even his sneers are off the mark.

Jon Gower Davies

Newcastle-upon-Tyne

CLAIRE RAYNER

YES, Claire Rayner – a tribute to whom appeared in the November *Freethinker* – was a remarkable person with a remarkable personality.

She offered a number of contributions to my book *Exodus to Humanism: Jewish Identity Without Religion* where she describes how and when she became a humanist, as well as her views about women, humanism, and religion.

She really did make the most of her life.

David Ibry
London

the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

i information **w** website **e** email

Birmingham Humanists:

w www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk. 0845 2015135. Selly Oak Friends, 938 Bristol Road, Selly Oak. Wed, Dec 8, 7.30pm. *The Birmingham RE Syllabus.*

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, Dec 1, 8pm. Ken Humphreys: *The Jesus Hoax.* Jan 5, 8pm: Bob Charleswood: *What is Your Religion? – the Census Question.*

w <http://homepage.nflworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>.

Bromley Humanists: Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. **i** 01959 574691.

w www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com

Central London Humanist Group: **i** Chair: Alan Palmer. Sec: Josh Kutchinsky. **e** info@centrallondonhumanists.org.

w www.meetup.com/central-london-humanists

Chiltern Humanists: Enquiries: 01296 623730.

Cornwall Humanists: **i** Patricia Adams, Sappho, Church Road, Lelant, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3LA. Tel: 01736 754895.

Cotswold Humanists: **i** Phil Cork Tel. 01242 233746.

e phil.cork@blueyonder.co.uk **w** [web www.phil-cork.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/humefl.htm](http://web.www.phil-cork.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/humefl.htm)

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: **i** Tel. 01926 858450. Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 2HB.

Cumbria Humanist Group: **i** Tel. 01228 810592. Christine Allen **w** www.secularderby.org **e** info@cumbria-humanists.org.uk.

Derbyshire Secularists: Meet at 7.00pm, the third Wednesday of every month at the Multifaith Centre, University of Derby. Full details on **w** www.secularderby.org

Devon Humanists:

e info@devonhumanists.org.uk

w www.devonhumanists.org.uk

Dorset Humanists: Monthly speakers and social activities. Enquiries 01202-428506.

w www.dorsethumanists.co.uk

East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:

i Carl Pintel 01298 815575.

East Kent Humanists: **i** Tel. 01843 864506. Talks and discussions on ten Sunday afternoons in Canterbury.

Essex Humanists: Programme available **i** 01268 785295.

Farnham Humanists: 10 New House, Farm Lane, Wood street Village, Guildford GU3 3DD.

w www.farnham-humanists.org.uk

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):

1 Gower St, London WC1E 6HD. Tel: 0844 800 3067.

Email: secretary@galha.org. **w** www.galha.org

Greater Manchester Humanist Group: **i** John Coss: 0161 4303463. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday, 7.30pm) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Wed, Dec 8: Public Meeting, phone John Coss for details.

Hampstead Humanist Society: **i** NI Barnes,

10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 OHP. Tel: 0207 328 4431 **w** www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk

Harrow Humanist Society: Meets the second Wednesday of the month at 8pm (except Jan, July and August) at the HAVS Centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. December 8th: Grand Victorian Yuletide Party. Non-members welcome.

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagema@hotmail.com

Humanists of Havering: **i** Natalie Kehr 01708 442161

e humanist@kehr.co.uk

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern

Ireland: **i** Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 **e** brianmccinton@btinternet.com.

w www.nirelandhumanists.net

Humanist Association Dorset: Information and programme from Jane Bannister. Tel: 01202 428506.

Humanist Society of Scotland: 272 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4JR, 0870 874 9002. Secretary: secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Information and events: info@humanism-scotland.org.uk or visit www.humanism-scotland.org.uk

uk Media: media@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Education: education@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Local Scottish Groups:

Aberdeen: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Dundee:** 07017 404778, dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Edinburgh: 07010 704775, edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Glasgow:** 07010 704776, glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Highland:** 07017 404779, highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire: **i** Robert Tee on 0113 2577009.

Isle of Man Freethinkers: **i** Jeff Garland, 01624 664796. Email: jeffgarland@wm.im. **w** www.iomfreethinkers.org

Humanists4Science: A group of humanists interested in science who discuss, and promote, both.

w <http://humanists4science.blogspot.com/>

Discussion group: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/humanists4science/>

Isle of Wight Secular and Humanist Group. **i** David

Broughton on 01983 755526 or **e** davidb67@clara.co.uk

Jersey Humanists: Contact: Reginald Le Sueur, La Petella, Rue des Vignes, St Peter, Jersey, JE3 7BE. Tel 01534 744780

e jerseyhumanists@gmail.com. **w** <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Jersey-Humanists/>

Lancashire Secular Humanists: Meetings 7.30 on 3rd Wed of month at Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High St, The Square, Great Eccleston (Nr. Preston) PR3 0YB. www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk **i** Ian Abbott,

Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 **e** ian@ianzere.demon.co.uk

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 07598 971420.

w www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Lewisham Humanist Group: **i** Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford SE6. Meetings on third Thurs, 7.30pm. Dec 16, Yuletide Party.

w www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk

Liverpool Humanist Group: **i** 07814 910 286

w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/

e lhghumanist@googlemail.com. Meetings on the second Wednesday of each month.

Lynn Humanists, W Norfolk & Fens: **i** Edwin Salter Tel: 07818870215.

Marches Secularists: **w** www.MarchesSecularists.org **e** Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org

Mid-Wales Humanists: **i** Maureen Lofmark, 01570 422648 **e** mlofmark@btinternet.com

Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group: **i** Chris Copsey, 1 Thistledown Road, Horsford NR10 3ST. Tel: 0160 3710262.

Northants Secular & Humanist Society: For information contact Ollie Killingback on 01933 389070.

North East Humanists (Teesside Group):

i C McEwan on 01642 817541.

North East Humanists (Tyneside Group):

i the Secretary on 01434 632936.

North London Humanist Group: Meets third Thursday of month (ex. August) 8 pm at Ruth Winston House, 190 Green Lanes, Palmers Green, N13 5UE. Plus social events. Contact Sec: 01707 653667 **e** enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk **w** www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

e enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

w www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

North Yorkshire Humanist Group: Secretary: Charles Anderson, 01904 766480. Meets second Monday of the month, 7.30pm, Priory Street Centre, York.

Oxford Humanists: Chair: John White, 77 High St, Chalgrove OX44 7SS, 01865 891876.

e jdwhite@talk21.com

Peterborough Humanists: **i** Edwin Salter Tel: 07818870215.

Sheffield Humanist Society: **i** 0114 2309754. University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield. Dec 1: Gary Jones: *The Optimum Population Trust.*

South Hampshire Humanists: Group Secretary, Richard Hogg. Tel: 02392 370689 **e** info@southhantshumanists.org.uk **w** www.southhantshumanists.org.uk

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Edward Gwinnell on 01935 473263 or **e** edward.gwinnell@talktalk.net

South Place Ethical Society. Weekly talks/meetings, Sundays 11am at Conway Hall Reockway Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8031/4 **e** programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk. Monthly programmes on request.

Suffolk Humanists & Secularists: 25 Haughgate Close, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1LQ. Tel: 01394 387462.

Secretary: Denis Johnston.

www.suffolkhands.org.uk **e** mail@suffolkhands.org.uk

Sutton Humanists: **i** Alan Grandy: 0208 337 9214. **w** www.suttonhumanists.co.uk

Watford Area Humanists: Meet on the third Tuesday of each month (except August and December) at 7.30 pm at Watford Town and Country Club, Watford **i** 01923-252013 **e** john.dowdle@watford.humanist.org.uk **w** www.watford.humanists.org.uk

Welsh Marches Humanist Group: **i** 01568 770282

w www.wmhumanists.co.uk **e** rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk.

Meetings on the 2nd Tues of the month at Ludlow, Oct to June. **West Glamorgan Humanist Group:** **i** 01792 206108 or 01792 296375, or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0JY.

Listing & Event Deadlines

Please send your listings and events notices to:
Listings, the *Freethinker*,
PO BOX 234, Brighton, BN1 4XD or preferably by
email to barry@freethinker.co.uk

Notices must be received by the 15th of the
month preceding publication.